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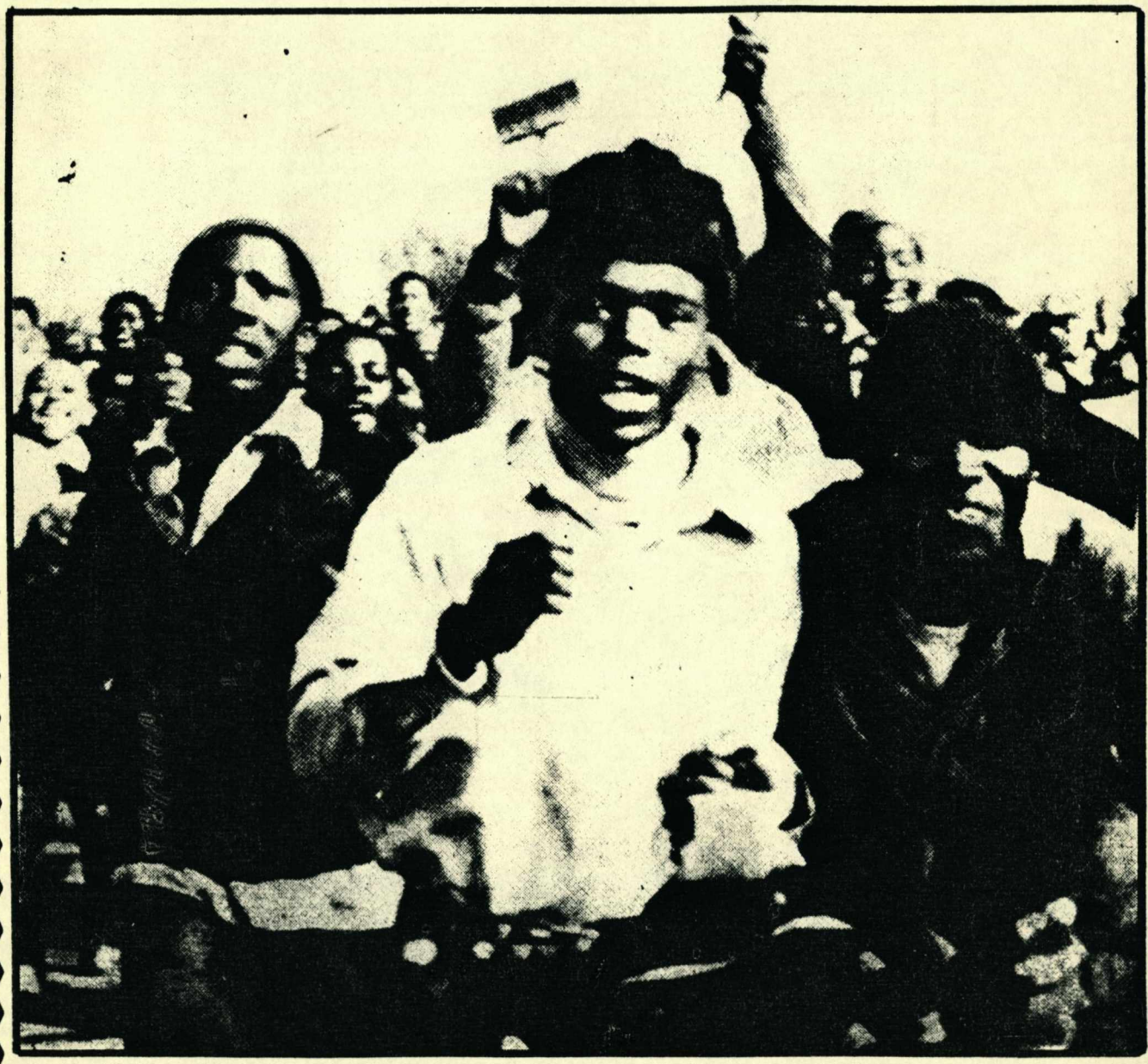
The Politics of Solidarity

Supporting Liberation Struggles in the Australian Context



by Denis Freney

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THE POLITICS OF SOLIDARITY : SUPPORTING LIBERATION STRUGGLES IN THE AUSTRALIAN CONTEXT

by Denis Freney

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In the socialist tradition, internationalism has always been a key concept. Internationalism has a number of aspects: national struggles are placed in their international context, while all should be done that is possible to help struggles in other parts of the world, in particular those in which the national capitalism / imperialism is directly involved.

This paper concerns the latter aspect.

Many complex problems arise. In this article, I will specifically focus on the problems experienced in building solidarity movements today, in Australia.

Many activists in solidarity movements today come from traditions other than the socialist one, particularly the Christian one. But all face similar problems and therefore most of what I have to say applies to solidarity movements generally.

RACISM AND PATERNALISM

Australia has a long tradition of racism, patriarchy and pro-imperialist sentiment. This tradition naturally affects the left and solidarity movements. While the left and solidarity activists reject racism, they can easily fall into one of its variants: paternalism. This often takes the form of "knowing what is best" for struggles in the Third World, preaching to them and even patting them on the back when they do "the right thing".

Trotskyist groups have a notorious record in this respect. The Socialist Labour League for example declares that Fretilin is "petty bourgeois" and that East Timor is part of Indonesia. The New Peoples Army in the Philippines is denounced by the SLL for "betraying the revolution". The same can be repeated for other groups. The conclusion that reach is that it is necessary to build (their) "revolutionary party" in these countries. This party will naturally be a mirror image of their own. And true to their word, they send cadres to such countries to "colonise" them and find a few individuals who can then proclaim the " Philippines section of the Fourth International". The Philippines has been inundated by such "colonisers" in the recent period.

In some cases, these sects seek to "colonise" and "take-over" holus-bolus the parties leading such revolutions, building up a faction inside them, and adapting their own image in Australia to fit that of the revolution they have attached themselves to.

It would be wrong to see this as a phenomenon restricted to trotskyist (or ex-trotskyist groups). The SPA and the CPA(M-L) similarly make their judgments on the basis of where a particular Third World party/movement lines up in the Sino-Soviet dispute. Thus maoists in Australia quite scandalously backed UNITA in Angola for many years, until it became completely obvious that Unita was a creature of imperialism and the South African regime, and they had to desist. The Socialist Party of Australia is now sponsoring the discreditted communist party in the Philippines simply because it is pro-Soviet and despite the fact that it sold out to Marcos in 1974.

All these are cases of paternalism under the cloak of revolutionary righteousness.

No one, including ourselves are exempt from paternalism. The CPA for example supported the integration of West Irian into Indonesia in the sixties, on the basis of support for the Indonesian revolution but without considering the rights of the West Papuans to self-determination.

Another aspect of paternalism can arise when we ignore the connections of solidarity movements with the struggles of the Aboriginal people for land rights and self-determination.Certainly, during the Viet Nam Moratorium and the Springbok demonstrations , the rising Black militant movement correctly took the white left to task for not devoting similar energies to supporting the Aboriginal struggle.

CHOOSING WHOM TO SUPPORT

There is however another side to the problem. When you set about to work concretely in solidarity with a peoples

in struggle, you are forced at some time or other to decide which political movement in the country concerned you are going to support, or alternatively you can decide "not to take sides" . However, this last option is no real option in most cases, as it can involve giving "even handed" support to a movement which may be small, demagogic or highly doubtful politically. The case of UNITA is an obvious case in point: in the early seventies it was demagogically ultra-revolutionary, while its reality was pro-imperialist.

I must also say that when I read of the representative of the Pan-Africanist Congress in Australia praising Trotsky one day at an SLL meeting, then Mao then next , then turning up to the SWP and following their line, I must ask just where he and the PAC stands . Words are cheap -- it is action on the ground that counts, as well as political goals and strategies.

I recall a visit by a representative of SWANU (Namibia) some years ago. His rhetoric was good . Today, SWANU is collaborating with the apartheid occupiers.

Sometimes the choice is easy, as with Fretilin in East Timor. Elsewhere,it is very difficult as in West Papua, to make a choice between the various wings of the OPM. In Afghanistan, we oppose the Soviet invasion, but it is impossible to support any of the opposition guerrilla groups. In the complexities of the Palestinian situation, in my personal opinion, you can only support the Arafat PLO, not because you can support Arafat and his politics necessarily, but because he and the PLO has the majority support of the Palestinians, particularly on the West Bank. It is for the Palestinian people to choose their leadership, not the regimes in Jordan, Libya, Syria or elsewhere...

As you can see, I've made a whole number of choices in relation to various struggles. This is simply inevitable. The question is : on what basis should such choices be made without falling into the trap of paternalism, and what exactly are the consequences that flow from the criteria set for making such choices.

It's obvious from the above, that you can't make choices on the basis of where such movements stand in the Sino-Soviet dispute nor on the basis of which movement has the most revolutionary rhetoric. Nor can such choices be made on the basis of how much these movements agree with our international or other perspectives.

The only criteria can be : which movement is leading the struggle against imperialism or local oppression and which has thesupport of the oppressed, or has a perspective of winning such support. And decisions in each case can only be based on the specifics of each struggle, its history and present reality.

SOLIDARITY MOVEMENTS AND LIBERATION MOVEMENTS: THE INTERCONNECTIONS

What relations should exist between solidarity movements and liberation movements in the countries concerned ? Solidarity movements can only develop their aims and projects in close consultation with the liberation movements.

The liberation movements know best their own needs and can see the role the Australian solidarity movement can play in their global strategy for such movements and the diplomatic struggle. Often such priorities are self-evident from the documents and slogans these movements issue. For example, the Vietnamese comrades at different times in their war of liberation set out clearly immediate demands to be made on the US imperialists, as well as the more longterm goal of "US (and Australian) troops out now". The diplomatic demands of the political-military struggle led them at various times to put forward demands such as "Stop the Bombing, Negotiate". When the CPA and other militants in the anti-war movement respected the requests of the Vietnamese and campaigned around that demand, we were denounced by the SWP and others on the ultra-left who knew best... In fact, they were "exposing" the Vietnamese comrades...

On the other hand, it remains a fact that Australians know best their own social-political milieu. We know what is possible and what is not. We know the "language" best suited to our environment. We have the task of putting the slogans and demands of the liberation movements into a language that can be accepted here and now.

Often this will also lead us to suggest another emphasis that is not necessarily that of the movement : when the anti-uranium movement was very big in Australia, it was obviously important to put emphasis on Marcos' nuclear power plans or to draw attention to South African and imperialist exploitation of Namibian uranium, to link these struggles with that of a mass movement here. Many other such parallel cases could be mentioned..

The relationships between solidarity movements and the liberation movements leading the struggles cannot be of "independence" of the solidarity movements from the liberation movements. Our role is

to support the liberation movements and so we must take our general political direction from the liberation movements and respect their decisions, even when individually we may have our doubts. If there is an accredited representative of a liberation movement stationed here, then thisbecomes much easier, because day-to-day leadership can be given by the representative. But even then there will naturally be some "autonomy" for the solidarity movement because it is Australians who should be able to best decide what action and projects have the best chance of success in Australia.

In many cases, there is a large refugee, student or migrant worker community in Australia from the country where the liberation movement is taking place. These communities often have their own community organisations, or branches of political parties from their homeland or form a solidarity group of their own. The communities from the country concerned in Australia can be a very effective part of any solidarity movement here, and everything should be done, when requested, tohelp them . That help can also include support in immigration and other matters, but that cannot become the principal purpose of an Australian solidarity movement as such.

The community groups and the solidarity movements do and should maintain close and working relations, but neither can substitute for the other. Both need their own independence to develop and cooperation should be based on that mutual respect for independence.

That is not to say that members of the communities should not take part in the solidarity movements - on the contrary. But solidarity movements should avoid being drawn into internal disputes in community groups and nor should solidarity groups or political parties use these connections to "colonise" the communities...

"DIPLOMATIC" AND "MATERIAL" SUPPORT

For convenience, we can divide the support solidarity groups are asked to give liberation movements into two broad categories : "diplomatic" and "material".

By "diplomatic" support, I mean not only an effort to get the Australian government to take a stand in the United Nations and other bodies (including within the "western alliance") in support of the liberation movement's demands, but also to get "diplomatic" support from non-governmental agencies (including the unions, political parties, churches, aid organisations etc) in the various international bodies or fora to which they are affiliated. That is, not only to get such non-governmental bodies to join in the pressure on the government, but also to campaign internationally for support.

Even when governments support the enemy unconditionally, a strong solidarity movement here can be in itself very effective "diplomatic" support for the liberation movement (as was the Viet Nam Moratorium for example). A worldwide and strong movement of popular support is worth as much as the verbal support of some governments ... Moreover, such strong popular movements have a negative effect on the enemy, helping in bringing about the demoralisation of its supporters. Even when governments change to a neutral position, that can be an effective victory.

When the ACTU recently adopted a good stand on East Timor, it had its effects internationally and locally, even though the unions havedone little to follow up on that resolution. When church bodies raise East Timor at international church gatherings, it helps encourage others overseas to act and annoys Jakarta no end....

The CPA can also do its own "lobbying" in international conferences or during visits by its delegations overseas, by raising issues such as East Timor, Kanaky and so on, in fora where they are seldom discussed and with parties which know little about these struggles. Similarly, ALP leftwing MPs have done an effective "diplomatic" job on such issues at meetings of the Parliamentary Union or at Socialist International conferences.

By "material" support I mean the many forms of financial and other support we can give to liberation movements. Again, the liberation movements should set the priorities and we have to make decisions about how best to campaign for them. It can mean simply hard cash, or funding an office of a liberation movement; funding visits by their leaders; building a school or medical centre, or whatever. In East Timor, it meant providing the human and technical (and more recently) the financial resources for illegal radio contact with the guerrillas from Darwin. In Vanuatu in 1977, it meant producing a small newspaper for worldwide distribution, explaining and winning support for their independence struggle at a crucial time.

In all such cases, providing "material" support can be a way of mobilising public opinion and therefore of "diplomatic" support. Sometimes it is the only way to make the struggle an issue in Australia. The Eritrean comrades have done a brilliant job in this

respect. A handful of them came to Australia as refugees and/or students. Eritrea is a long way away; their country has few visible links with Australia. The struggle was little know here, including on the left. The Eritrean comrades did get their literature around, a few articles were printed, but the impact was minimal. So they decided to concentrate their efforts in getting material support from churches and aid organisations. They have obtained a great deal of such aid, and aid and other workers, as well as journalists, have gone to liberated Eritrea and come back to report not only on the good use the aid was being put to, but also on the heroic struggle being waged. They have succeeded on the publicity front as well as on the material.

In the final analysis, there is no contradiction between "diplomatic" and "material" solidarity. But some hard-headed and realistic decisions have to be made about emphases, always in consultation with the liberation movements.

WHAT SORT OF SOLIDARITY MOVEMENT?

What sort of solidarity movement should we aim to build ? The goal should be, as much as realistically possible, to build a mass movement, or at least one with a mass orientation. Of course, it is impossible in most cases to build a mass movement like the Viet Nam Moratorium or the Palm Sunday nuclear disarmament marches and to set goals unrealistically high can be counter-productive and demoralising.

But it is also wrong to set our sights too low, defining a solidarity movement as something narrowly defined and unable to have a mass impact. We can define ourselves into a tiny group that is incestuous and blames everyone but itself for its failure. It can produce the politics of ultra-leftism of denunciation or production of small circulation newsletters, or of concentration on talking to others on the far-left or in similarly small solidarity groups.

Producing publicity is essential, including those small-run newsletters. The newsletters can and do operate as organisers and recruiters to the solidarity movement. But that is but a small part of the "propagandist" activity necessary.

Activists have of necessity to become "specialists" in the struggle they are supporting and well informed enough to answer all the questions the media may pose. But activists should also become "specialists" in getting the message of the struggle across to the Australian people. Small-run newsletters to update supporters and members are essential and they can also be useful for the media, union leaders, politicians etc. But that is essentially a drop in the ocean .

General propaganda, based on the assumption that the reader has no knowledge of the struggle whatsoever is obviously necessary. General propaganda which replies to the lies of the enemy is also essential. Often such general propaganda is available from the liberation movements themselves, but even so often needs to be adapted for an Australian audience. And always it should seek to have an Australian orientation.

The number of activists in solidarity groups is usually small. They are in most cases volunteers, although, with high unemployment , that can sometimes mean activists are virtually fulltime. The finances available to liberation movements are generally, and particularly initially, very limited. Their energies can be easily dissipated, leading to disillusionment and cynicism.

So targetting of propaganda, deciding where to try to raise support, whether to concentrate on "diplomatic" or "material" support and the interaction between them should be a top priority, as well as setting as a first objective the need to become "specialists" on the struggle being supported, seeking to consult with the liberation movement concerned, and finding that often elusive "Australian connection" . The aim should be to become a "mass movement" but with a very hard-headed understanding that that his usually very difficult and sometimes impossible. What follows are some suggestions about how this process should be tackled ...

ACCEPTING POLITICAL REALITIES

To aim to form a mass movement means accepting the bounds of Australian politics as they are. It means finding out exactly what is the government position and that of the unions, churches etc (if in fact they have any position !) It means that personal political prejudices must be put aside: if you can find a Democrat or Liberal MP who will take a positive position, then you should also be willing to lobby all factions of the ALP and the union movement.

You can find yourselves with surprising "friends", like Michael Hodgman on East Timor, for example. While you may be repulsed by Hodgman on every other issue, and want to have nothing to do with him, you have then to recall: "I'm fighting here not for my party or own political view, but for the

liberation movement. Do they want Hodgman giving Fraser headaches or not?" Of course they do. If we do not accept that framework, then we are placing our own interests or views over those of the liberation movement. It's something of a crunch issue.

That does not mean we should idealise people like Hodgman, but recognise his support for the struggle, report it, and engage him in actions, declarations even demonstrations. And when he sells out or goes quiet, then that should also be noted.

After all, as any liberation movement will tell you, dividing the enemy is a very important operation, but one to be carried out without any illusions. (And be sure that Hodgman had no illusions about his leftist allies on the East Timor issue !)

If we want a mass movement, in the hard context of Australian political realities, we must pose our struggle in terms which can appeal to the mass and their delegated representatives (no matter how unrepresentative they may be of their real interests). Thus : not Victory for the East Timorese Revolution, but support the right of the East Timorese people to self-determination and independence, in the belief if that right was freely exercised, that would mean victory for that revolution...

The rhetoric of the liberation movement in the country may well be different to the way the case is presented in a country like Australia, although usually the immediate demands (eg. end apartheid, one person one vote, withdrawal of Indonesian troops etc) are the same both inside the country and in a country such as Australia. But even so, often the rhetoric surrounding them will be different, otherwise we would have a revolutionary situation here where the same rhetoric will be applicable.

Because we are not in a revolutionary situation, we must work within the institutions that exist, both the physical and the liberal-democratic"ideological institutions". Of course, many of the activists who work in solidarity movements have become devoted to the struggle because they have been inspired by the heroism, sacrifice and revolutionary elan in the country and liberation movement concerned.

We all need that injection of revolutionary elan from time to time. But it should not be allowed to become a romanticism, which allows us to substitute a celebration of the revolution overseas which can easily become an ultra-left rejection of the difficulties of our own non-revolutionary situation, and a refusal (in fact) to get hands dirty in the routine of trying to get mass support for the liberation movement concerned. That in turn means we do a grave disservice to the liberation movement we are supposedly helping.

WORKING WITHIN THE INSTITUTIONS

Let's look then at the various "physical" institutions and how "ideological" institutions overlap with them. For convenience and brevity, I will look at the way to approach institutions such as parliament, political parties, unions, churches, aid organisations etc through the example of the first two, although obviously differences arise one to the other, but mainly in emphasis.

If one of the goals set is to change government policy, then it is obviously necessary to work with the major political parties, as well as those on the Left.

Nor, in the case of the ALP, does it mean working only with the ALP Left, although this will be the major basis of support within the ALP. Parliamentarians (mainly federal but also state) should be targetted with regular publicity, explaining the struggle and arguing the demands and the concrete projects being supported. (If such material is hand-delivered to the various parliaments, then it will be distributed free through the internal mail). The parliamentary press galleries should also be covered while personal approaches to some sympathetic members of parliamentarians' staff should also take place. Parliamentary Amnesty International groups, various committees dealing with foreign affairs and defence and similar groups should be given special attention. In the federal parliamentary ALP left it is often possible to find one or more MPs who will take the responsibility of doing some lobbying for the particular liberation movement, "specialising" in that struggle. It may be possible to get an informal parliamentary grouping off the ground which will include a number of MPs who'll meet from time to time to see what can be done around a particular issue. (Such a group exists on East Timor, for example).

As with anyone, parliamentarians will usually take much more interest and get personally involved if they visit the liberation movement and/or country concerned, get to know its leaders and see for themselves the oppression and resistance. Thus getting parliamentarians individually or as a group to visit a particular country or movement, can be very productive.

Often it is important to also get non-parliamentary figures from the parties to also take a particular struggle as

a personal responsibility. Here, the work also overlaps with work with unions etc (in the case of the ALP). Policies are after all made at party conferences (even when not implemented in government). Solidarity groups should be up to date on the exact policy of parties (if any) on the particular struggle, and should work out appropriate amendments or alternatives that can be realistically developed by supporters at the various party conferences.

Parliamentarians can ask questions, speak in the grievance debate, raise matters at committees and directly with ministers and get the parliamentary library research section to prepare reports. While the end result might seem minimal, the overall impact should not be underestimated. Bureaucrats in government departments and within party structures find themselvesregularly pressed on such matters and forced to justify their stand and advice to ministers. In turn, when they are obliged to put their arguments and apologias on paper, then the solidarity movements (and the liberation movements) can reply, including publicly, forcing the bureaucrats to find new apologia for the oppressors. If this in turn leads to public debate , with some rightwing journalists or academics rushing to the defence of the oppressors, an important step has been taken: the issue becomes one of public debate and the solidarity group is no longer just talking to itself and a few others on the left.

Nor should we underestimate the importance of getting resolutions through ALP conferences, the ACTU or national union conference, church gatherings, or endorsed by aid or human rights organisations etc.. The resolutions may remain dead letters. But they can be used to mobilise active support in Australia and overseas. The fact that the last ACTU congress adopted a good (if not perfect) resolution on East Timor and did so unanimously means it can be used to win concrete support among unions and the rank-and-file and also at union conferences overseas. It can also be used in the ALP, particularly among affiliated unions... And finally, it is of use in generalised propaganda, even though the ACTU executive may not apply it at all.

The basic points made above apply generally -- all such "institutions" should be regularly informed about the struggle, concrete proposals for action by them advanced, visits arranged to the movement or country concerned, contact with liberation movement leaders organised, their conferences be asked to pass resolutions, act on them and lobby around them locally and internationally. Both "diplomatic" and "material" support sought.

Support has to be mobilised in such "institutions" (unions, church, aid and human rights groups) not only at the top (by lobbying as we do MPs) but also and most importantly from the grassroots up. However, it is wrong simply to work at the grassroots -- work at all levels should be seen as supplementing each other.

There are also other "institutions" of a mass and protest nature: the anti-war movement, the women's movement, the environmentalist movement etc. Work to win support in these other "single-issue" movements can be as important as any other aspect of work, because here is an already mobilised constituency whose support can be won when the liberation struggle is linked with their particular issue. This does not mean that the solidarity movement should demand that the peace movement for example become a sort of generalised solidarity movement, on the basis that a nuclear war will arise from particular wars/crises, particularly in the Third World. That represents first of all a reductionist view of world politics and secondly, we need to respect the individuality and autonomy of each movement, even if we may be critical of the fact that, for example, they may too narrowly define their objectives.

WORKING WITH THE MEDIA

As we all know, the media is about "news", defined narrowly within the parameters drawn up by TV and other newscasters. While journalists, like everyone else, need that general background information, they also need specific newsy stories which they can use or more often use as the basis for a story they will themselves investigate and write up.

We can question the values that lie behind "news" as defined in the mass media, but we are forced to work within those parameters, unless we are to give up hope of favorable media treatment.

Often of course, when news of importance is being generated in the country concerned, say today South Africa or the Philippines, journalists will seek a comment from the liberation movement's representative here or from the solidarity movement (obviously the first is the more newsworthy). We should make sure therefore that the various journalists and media organisations have the contact numbers , home and office, for liberation movement representatives and solidarity movement spokespersons on their contact lists, and that these are regularly updated.

Spokespersons have to observe the "rules" of the media, particularly in TV

and radio news grabs. You should ask how long you may have to speak, how long they want answers to each question to be and get into the habit of giving the short, snappy reply. That's often not easy. In any case, you have a little leeway : in most cases, the TV or radio won't play on air the actual questions, so if you want to swing your answer a little in another direction, you can do so. But you have to respect the fact that the journalists want some sort of reply to their questions, not a long lecture on something you think is important. If you want to raise another issue, let the journalist know and she/ he will often agree, particularly if it is a news angle she/he hadn't thought of.

Similarly, media releases should not be long, but short, snappy and controversial, with all the relevant points raised and details given for follow-up contact. If you feel it's necessary to include any background material , include it in a separate background paper. Many journalists are well informed and do their homework. But if you're having a media conference, media organisations will often send along some junior reporter who knows next to nothing and needs the background material.

It's always worth getting to know reporters who have a particular interest in your solidarity struggle, collecting their names, addresses and phone numbers and sending them all relevant publicity material. It might sound cynical, but even hostile journalistswith some expertise should also be served up with your publicity. If the aim is to have a public debate, it is therefore also important that the apologists for the oppressor also respond. You can in turn demand the right of reply. You can't be choosy about your allies either: John Tingle has consistently supported East Timor, even though he's reactionary on almost every other issue (particularly South Africa).Personally, one may be horrified having to speak on his show, but such personal feelings cannot mean giving up the possibility of putting your case to a wide audience. Talkback radio is important, no matter that it is dominant, at least in commercial radio by reactionary demagogues like Laws. The far right, such as the Right to Lifers, use the talkback programs very effectively. They have people, particularly those at home, who monitor the radio continuously (and in a co-ordinated way) and ring up immediately a topic that interests them is raised. The Left should also get into the habit. We should also study the way in which talkback comperes put down opponents and work out ways of combatting them.

If you are going to try to get your view across to the media, you have also to do so largely within the ideological parameters they operate in, which means usually (and at best) liberal democratic values, while also avoiding the reactionary connotations that can be present within such ideological frameworks. For example, on East Timor, it means arguing for self-determination and against the expansionism of the regime in Jakarta without falling into the trap of anti-Indonesian racist prejudice which is very close to the surface in Australia. In fact, one of the main attacks by the apologists for Suharto is that we are doing just that: the reactionaries who pursue a paternalistic and racist line of saying the Indonesian people only understand dictatorial rule, accuse us of whipping up racism against Indonesia.

You'll find that many of your media releases and initiatives, even when they follow all the media "rules", don' t get a response. Rather than using this to dismiss the media as being useless or biassed etc,make an analysis of why you didn't get a run, discuss with sympathetic journalists. You might have been just plain unlucky (it may have been a full "news" day - lots of murders or Keating and Hawke having a blue or whatever!) Maybe you didn't give them a story as they define it. You after all have to hang your release on something that has just happened or will happen. (That means the liberation movements also need to have a good media service, to get news to you as soon as possible - the media requires "hot" news).

Often it is best to offer a sympathetic journalist a scoop - that is, sound him or her out first, then if interested hold the story back from other news outlets to gain better coverage in say one newspaper. This must be done carefully and on well-chosen issues otherwise you'll antagonise other journalists and media. If they get their share however they're unlikely to complain.

Media conferences should be used sparingly. If you have a visiting leader from a liberation movement, you should find a particular "hot" issue, with some new on-the-spot information, to feature in your media release, putting background information in a separate background paper. A short biography should accompany the media release. You might think that it is newsworthy in itself that a visitor from a liberation movement is going to speak, but remember your media release will be one among many that will land on the chief of staff's desk and he or she will want to see some point in sending a journalist along. If there's no hot issue to interest the news pages then

a features editor might be interested in a personalised report (and this can often be more useful in terms of space and real content). Your visitor may be used to the ways of the western media and will understand how to handle the matter. Sometimes she or he will be rightly unwilling to push themselves forward as a "leader", but the value of such personalised articles should be pushed, after all, a potted life story can include an emphasis on the struggle as such and be suitably modest.

Obviously, if you want to communicate on the media (or anywhere for that matter!) you have to avoid jargon (unless it's the media's own jargon, of course) and avoid the long, complex sentence and explanation. There's nothing wrong with expressing emotion or outrage, provided it is done under control and well judged. Rage should not be directed, naturally, at the journalist interviewing you. Outrage should be made comprehensible by getting some parallel with Australia: in the case of East Timor , we often use the example of what the 100,000 plus dead in Timor would be if it happened in the same proportions here: 2 1/2 million dead.

To sum up : solidarity movements need their own PR/media people, who know how the media thinks, if they are to be effective in getting their views across. We can't afford the fulltime professional like our enemies, but we can certainly train the effective part-time amateurs ! The secret is to think like a journalist and take the media on its own terms, not opportunistically, but always with your political purpose in mind, as a sort of litmus test of what is and what is not acceptable. If we don't enter into the media work, we hand the use of the media over to the professionals, to the politicians , big business and the embassies.

WORKING WITH COMMUNITY MEDIA

A word on the growing community media. Although stations like 2SER reach only a limited audience, their audience is still quite large compared with that you can reach with say 2,000 leaflets. You generally have a very sympathetic audience and it should be used to the fullest. Similarly, there is now a substantial left and movement press: these should also not be ignored : articles should be suggested to the environmentalist, women's, anti-war, gay, student, church and other media, offering them an angle on the struggle suitable to their audience, and visitors should be encouraged to speak on such specific angles to the differing audiences.

A word of warning however seems appropriate: the community media and work on it cannot replace the mass media. It should not be allowed to become an easy way out. Similarly, having your own radio show should not take up an inordinant amount of time of activists and above all the key organisers of a solidarity movement. It is generally speaking much more useful to get your view across on programs such as Razors Edge, Politics Magazine etc on 2SER than spend an enormcus amount of time (and money) on your own program. The major current affairs shows on 2SER have a much bigger audience while yours will probably be minimal.

To do all this media work fully effectively is a huge job and could easily keep one or two fulltimers occupied without a break. Few solidarity groups have such human or financial resources and so media work should also be prioritised, depending on the situation at various times. In any case, you cannot expect to have enough news to keep the media interested all the time. Interest and news comes in bursts and you need to keep your powder dry. Like all solidarity work, media work will have its ups and downs. And one task of any movement is to preserve human and financial resources and prevent "burn out". The leaflet and the newsletter are essential but the old axiom is true: "the best publicity is free publicity".

CULTURAL WORK

What can be broadly described as "cultural work" is also very important. To persuade a film maker to make a film on the struggle; a singer to sing a song; a playwright to write a play -- all can have more impact in the end that a journalist writing a story. In any case, getting performers to donate their services for a fund-raiser or to sign a public statement of support, can also have their impact. On the same lines, getting a well-known cultural figure or troupe from the country concerned to tour Australia when they also identify and promote the struggle can have more impact than a political speaker touring. And funding can often be arranged and even money made to give to the liberation movement.

THE ROLE OF DEMONSTRATIONS

Finally, I want to take up the issue of the role of demonstrations in solidarity actions. I believe we should always be clear about why we call a demonstration,

not just on the demands etc, but on the impact we hope it will have. We should never engage in holding a demo-for-a-demos sake because that is what we and others are used to doing. Similarly, we should not just hold a conference for the sake of holding a conference but set out its goals.

A demonstration or a conference can allow your supporters, particularly those who won't come along to committee meetings or get involved in organisational work, to express their support vocally and demonstrably. It can deepen commitment and draw those previously untouched into activity. None of these things should be denigrated or ignored.

Demonstrations can also be planned to build up to a major demonstration or other action. In 1971, six of us began with a very small demonstration against apartheid at a women's tennis tournament at White City where South Africans were participating. A few ran onto the court, disrupting the South African's game, got arrested and gained publicity. This was publicly a lead up to the next protests against a South African surf lifesaving team at Coogee, followed by another bout of disruption, arrests, publicity when 600 turned up. And finally, the campaign (which was not simply at the level of demos) led to the huge anti-Springbok rugby protests.

Of course, that was a particular situation at a particular time. It is impossible to repeat. But the lesson of planning ahead, in a real campaign cannot be ignored.

Another lesson from this and from the Viet Nam Moratorium is that we were able to offer people the chance to show their personal commitment in a demonstrative and courageous way that offered the chance of having a real effect on Australian participation -- Australian troops in Viet Nam; South African sports teams here. The "Australian connection" and precise and obtainable goals were the key to the mobilisation.

Demonstrations should also be seen as media events . In the sixties and seventies that is what most of them were, primarily . In the eighties, in much of the media, demonstrations are seen as "old hat" unless of course they are very big like the Palm Sunday marches. Media require otherwise that they have something to report besides just another demonstration : the speaker is well known and going to say something newsworthy (not just express solidarity); the demonstration is particularly colorful or militant (although this has much less attraction nowadays) and that it be of a reasonable size and fit into something that is already in the news. Even so, in the opinion of most news editors, chiefs of staff etc, demonstrations unless very large, are old hat and non-news. As a result, it is very hard to get a run-of-the -mill demonstration reported, except on community media and sometimes 2JJJ and ABC news.

Whether we like it or not, this is something to be taken into account. Demonstrations if small and without media coverage can also be demoralising. A hard-headed decision has to be taken, weighing up the pros- and cons. The worst approach is to have a demonstration because that is what is traditionally done, without thinking out its value or not.

Similarly, when deciding whether to hold a conference or not , a decision should be made as to its real purpose. Obviously, conferences/seminars are mainly educational: they provide a means of getting hard information and discussion of problems before an audience that is supportive but not necessarily well informed. If this is the purpose of the conference, then it should be structured accordingly. It should not try to cover everything or have speakers mouthing generalised rhetoric or with each struggle or topic being confined to 30 minutes(as happened at one recently). A decision should be taken about what level of understanding the conference is aimed at. There's nothing more frustrating than a speaker either speaking on the most elementary level when the audience is already informed of the basics, or speaking way above their level of understanding. Everyone should be aware at what level the conference is pitched. Above all, supporters should not be expected to sit through a weekend conference simply as a sign of support: a conference is not a demonstration !

If the conference is a "working" one where strategies and projects for future action are being worked out, that should be specified and any "educational" talks be linked clearly with the working nature of the conference. Time in all conferences should be allowed for the fullest audience participation -- nothing is more frustrating for most conference attenders than being subject to a mind-shattering and never-ending series of speakers, particularly when they largely engage in rhetoric.

Conferences can also have a media aspect: if it's educational, then the media should be alerted to those speakers who will say something new or newsworthy. If it is a working conference, then the media should be immediately informed of the decisions taken, with the most newsworthy

at the top of the media release and contact for spokespeople immediately available given.

All this is pretty obvious, but there have been conferences in the recent period which have been utterly frustrating -- a long series of speakers, virtually no time for discussion, a bewildering array of topics, and with the converted preaching to the converted, without imparting anything but basic rhetoric.

BY WAY OF CONCLUSION

What I have written may seem all very cold and calculating. After all, almost all of us are involved in solidarity movements because we have a personal and emotional attachment to a particular struggle, which I hope then extends to all liberation struggles. But such commitment is not enough. The liberation struggles themselves cannot be waged -- and are not waged -- simply on an emotional commitment. They must match their enemies in all fields, plan strategy and tactics, work on the diplomatic level (and think for one moment of the atmosphere they must endure in the UN or lobbying diplomats and politicians in Canberra). We must be equally scientific and hard-headed when we organise to support these struggles. Many come to support solidarity struggles because of a romantic view of such struggles, the revolutionary elan and sacrifices entailed in the front line, as well as horror at the torture , massacres and repression they face. The best way to translate that commitment into reality is to build support and solidarity within our own context.

As has been the theme of this paper, that means having a mass approach to all solidarity work which in turn means working with and within "institutions" as they exist, not as we perhaps would like them to exist.

For many of us, solidarity movements are the first concrete contact with revolutionary ideas and action, even though far distant from our shores. This in turn can lead to an easy transposition of these revolutionary experiences overseas to our own non-revolutionary situation. That in turn can lead to ultra-leftism, to a de facto rejection of our own reality .

The best way to transpose that revolutionary experience gained from overseas struggles is to work in the way in which any successful revolutionary movement must work: to study our own realities, to keep in touch with our own realities and above all to seek out concretely the way in which the movement here can be taken, no matter how slowly, towards socialism and liberation. That is the opposite to ultra-leftist posturing and romanticism.

And that is no more evident than when we concretely examine how we can be give solidarity to those liberation struggles which have inspired us.

We all need an injection of revolutionary elan from time to time. But much of the solidarity work is routine, involving work with conservative media, politicians etc. winning a bit here and there. But in doing so we help, no matter how little, to change the world and therefore to change Australia as well.

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